

## A RENCONTRE WITH ITALIAN BRIGANDS.

BY AN ENGLISH TRAVELLER.

The clock struck ten as we left Monselice, and my companions composed themselves, soon informing me by their deep inspirations that they were fast asleep. The voiture was a small landau with a leathern front, which buckled on to the head when it was up, and was rendered a close carriage, the said front being fitted up with small windows, that permitted a view of the country, and the vehicle was likewise furnished with curtains on each side. We had jogged on for about half an hour, and I was sitting opposite to my fellow-travellers, with my back to the horses, listening to the monotonous "hi!" of the postilion, and the eternal jangling of the bells on the bridles, when our carriage suddenly stopped, and I heard a tumult of strange voices in the road. On turning to discover the cause of this interruption, I saw, through the front glasses, a party of six or seven men ranged in a semicircle across the road, pointing their guns at the carriage, and gradually closing around us.

There could be no mistake as to our visitors, or their intentions. I awoke my friends; and recollecting that I had eight English sovereigns loose in my waistcoat pocket, contrived to thrust seven of them into my mouth, the remaining one I slipped into my shoe. I had barely concealed this last, when the curtains were torn violently down, and the muzzles of six guns made their appearance in most unpleasant propinquity to our heads, followed by a half a dozen of the most ill-favored visages I had ever seen. I have said there was a full moon, and I was enabled to perceive that the guns were upon full cock. The ruffians were likewise armed with pistols in their girdles, and long poniard-knives that dangled from their necks and gleamed romantically in the moonbeams. Singular enough, neither myself nor my friend were flurried at this uncomfortable moment. Odd ideas will cross people's minds in the most serious positions, and the solo thought that struck me was, that our situation was precisely similar to a scene I had witnessed in an adaptation of Paul Clifford at Covent Garden, some three or four years back, when the "Bath mail" was robbed on the stage.

My companions descended, in obedience to the orders of the banditti; but I was less fortunate. The door on my side chanced to have been despoiled of its hinges, and was closed with a thin plate of iron fixed on by nails. It was impossible to open it, and I was unable to get out. An immense ruffian of six feet two, who appeared to be the chief of the party, finding that it did not give way, after several strenuous pulls, finally seized me by the collar, and dragging me over the door, flung me with some violence upon the ground close to the hind wheels of the carriage. I was half stunned by the fall; but we had no time allowed for qualmsiness, as a general ruffling immediately commenced. Two of the party entered the carriage, and threw everything out. They tore down the linings, and broke the seats open, to make sure that nothing was concealed; after which they cut the cords which secured our luggage underneath the postilion's seat, and handed down our effects in no very gentle manner, swearing, pulling, and hurrying us about all the time.

"*Presto! presto! sold! sacramento!*" was all they uttered; but its meaning, accompanied by most expressive pantomime, was very obvious. I had the side pocket of my blouse filled with *zwanzigers* for paying the posts, being the banker of the party, and I immediately emptied it into the cap of the one who had the charge of me, hoping that this would satisfy them. But I was mistaken. Each of us was rifled in turn, and it was with no small regret that I saw them possess themselves of my knife and pencil case, which, being keepsakes, I would fain have preserved. My pocket-book also passed into their hands; but upon my exclaiming "*Passaporta!*" it was returned;—a circumstance I hailed with much satisfaction, since in one of its compartments was a letter of credit upon Rothschild for one hundred pounds, which I have saved. It may be imagined that I had not much leisure to watch their proceedings with my comrades. I saw my friend's valuable gold watch fly from his waistcoat pocket as they broke the guard; and I recollect observing the Hamburg gentleman crouching on his knees and elbows, with his nose in the dust, under the carriage; but whether from sheer fright, or by command, I know not, nor did I like to inquire afterwards. We all lost our braces, with which they appeared extremely delighted, as well as our handkerchiefs. I had a scarf round my neck, fastened by two gold pins and a chain, which I had fixed in with silk. Of course, such a prize was not to be left; and, after many violent attempts to get the scarf away, during which I was nearly strangled, my robber coolly cut it from my neck, pins and all. My readers may be assured that the feel of the cold steel against my neck was anything but pleasant; and I firmly believe that it would have been a matter of perfect indiffer-

to the brigands whether we thrust the point into my chest or not. When he had concluded I was ordered to retake my seat in the carriage, a command which I gladly obeyed, in the hope that they had finished with me; since the leathern pursebelt that I wore had escaped their observation, and in one of its pockets were two of Herries's circular notes for twenty pounds each, besides a few napoleons. But, unfortunately, another of the party took it into his head to search me, and I once more got down at his command, which was, as heretofore, accompanied by a loaded gun at my ear. In vain I replied "*Niente*" to all his sounding of my different pockets. He still remained unsatisfied, and seizing the waistband of my trousers, tore them down the side-seam for some twelve inches, when the luckless *cintura* made its appearance, and was in an instant transferred from my waist to his own. A circumstance also occurred that gave me much uneasiness for the moment. The German had a valuable diamond ring on his finger, which he could not readily remove, and he called to us in a voice of extreme horror that they were going to cut off his finger. He, however, implored a moment's patience, and contrived, by wetting his finger, to take off the jewel. It struck me that I had also a ring which could not be got off, and although not of much value, might still tempt them to mutilate my hand. By good fortune I managed to slip the ring round until the signet was turned towards the palm, and thus escaped their notice.

We were not sorry when they thrust us finally into the vehicle; for we thought it something to have got off with our lives. My friend and myself had been walking through Switzerland, and had only two knapsacks for our luggage; but the German's loss was considerable, including, besides his *mallet* and carpet-bag, a writing-desk, in which were some hundreds of francs, and a letter of credit upon a banker at Naples for two thousand more. The only things I saved were the sovereigns I had put into my mouth, my pocket-book, and the little gondolas which were in the same pocket with my handkerchief. As we were starting again they threw into the carriage my old straw boating-hat which I had worn all the way from Chertsey; but my friend's new Tuscan adorned the head of one of the party as they marched off amongst the trees.

It was midnight before we arrived at Rovigo. There is a *pont volant* across the Adige, about a league from the town, which it took us half an hour to cross, being—as they always are—on the other side when we got up to the river. They also detained us some time, because we had no money to pay the gold, and I did not choose to exhibit our remaining scanty stock after what had occurred. At last we were allowed to proceed, under promise of payment on our arrival at the inn. From this spot a tedious journey of an hour brought us to the next town. The roads were rough, and full of holes from the late rains, the horses sluggish and we impatient to arrive.

They had retired to rest at the posthouse, but we soon aroused them; and, having explained our circumstances, despatched a messenger to the *Stazioni di Carabinieri*, to summon the police, and awaited their return in our bedchamber. It is but justice to state, the proprietor of the inn (the *Albergo della Posta* at Rovigo) was anxious to show us every attention, notwithstanding we gave him to understand that we had not the means of remuneration. He paid the money for the post, as well as the trifle we owed for passing the bridge, and begged that we would consider ourselves at home as long as we chose to stay.

The police arrived in about ten minutes, and commenced taking our depositions, and giving directions, for the departure of ten or twelve carbiniers, who immediately left Rovigo for the scene of our stoppage. After them came several reporters to the provincial newspapers, equally anxious to be made acquainted with the particulars of the robbery; in fact, we were not able to get to sleep before three, and then I dreamt that I had got all my money back again, and that we saw the brigands chained by the legs, and sweeping the streets, after the manner of the criminal scavengers at Leghorn.

We were compelled to keep our beds the next morning until our garments were repaired. About nine the Venetian diligence, which we should have come by had we been able to procure places, arrived at Rovigo. A young Prussian nobleman, whom we had met at Venice, the Baron de Hartmann, was amongst the passengers, and having heard what had occurred, it struck him that it must be ourselves, as he was standing on the steps of *Albergo dell' Europa* when our gondola left. He hastened into our room, and in the most gentlemanlike manner, begged we would take of him as much money as was necessary for our wants, at the same time throwing a rouleau of napoleons upon the bed. We merely borrowed as much as would be sufficient to arrive at Florence, where we calculated upon obtaining assistance; nor would this fine young fellow take the slightest acknowledgement. He observed, "that the word of an Englishman was sufficient."

We left Rovigo about noon, surrounded by nearly the whole population, who had turned out to stare at us. There was something ludicrous in our appearance, despoiled as we were of nearly all our wearing apparel; and it may be imagined we found little difficulty in clearing the *douanes* on our entry into the Papal States. At Bologna we purchased such few necessaries as were immediately requisite for our toilet; and these, tied up in a cotton pocket-handkerchief, were

all the effects we carried into Florence. At this city, through the liberality of Mr. Hall, the English banker, we obtained fifty pounds upon the Paris letter of credit; and the German met with the same attention from that gentleman. The second day after our arrival we met M. Hartmann in the Palazzo Pitti, and it gave us great pleasure to be enabled to pay our small debt, together with a ring, which we begged him to accept as a *souvenir*.

Our adventure made us the heroes of all the *table d'hotes* between Florence and Geneva, and we frequently heard our story recounted, with many amusing exaggerations. We were likewise advised in several instances as to how we ought to have acted, and caused much astonishment at the statement that we had travelled without pistols. Of one thing I am certain—that if we had offered the least resistance, we should have been killed, for they were seven to three, and all armed to the teeth. Besides which, the fatal adventure of Mr. and Mrs. Hunt, who were shot by the brigands, some years back, on the road to Pæstum, during their wedding tour, was fresh in my memory, and we heard on all sides that, had that unfortunate gentleman delivered up his property quietly there would have been no bloodshed.